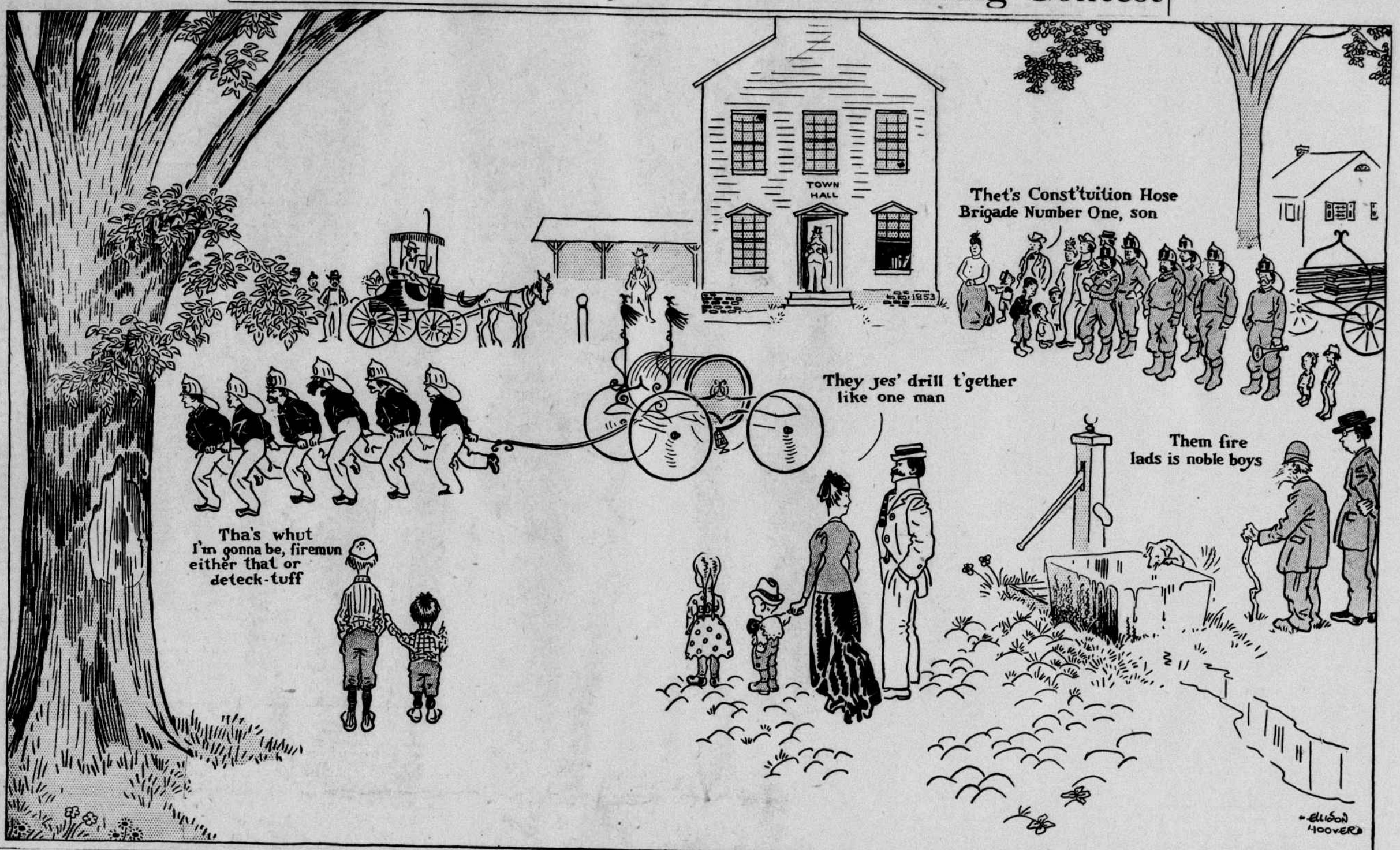
WHEN WERE THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

Firemen's Muster Day---The Hose Running Contest



Charlie Chaplin as a Philosopher Shows His Serious Side

Continued from Third Page.

Wilde fascinates me. But I dislike any suggestion of the mechanical or the non-human in literature. Science? I hate it.

"I find myself constantly skipping the plot in a book. You see, I don't want any sense of originality spoiled. I don't want to be bothered by a suspicion, after I've nursed an idea, that I feel would simply paralyze the world, that maybe some one, some where, had written the same thing and I'd read it—and forgotten it.

"Yes, I have what I trust is a really big idea for a picture I want to play in. I've carried it around in my mind for a couple of years, the way we all do, and I hope to use it in the near future. It's about a clown. It will show the hardships of his life. It will present him behind the scenes as it's never been done before—truthfully. It won't have any of the sentimental romance you see so often in such plays. It will show how his work is simply bread and cheese to him—merely his means of earning a living, nothing more. And it will reveal his utter contempt for his audiences.

"It's like 'Deburau'? I never saw that play and I don't know its history. Of course, this picture will have its comedy, but it will be the most serious thing I've ever attempted. For my custard pie days are over. Yes, possibly I shall do 'Beau Brummell' some day."

Custard Pies Renounced, Laughs at Knighthood

But though he has renounced the custard pie and all its works he doesn't show the bitterness toward that paramount element in his past career that most converts do toward their early dissipations. When it was suggested that he might be knighted on his trip to England Chapin, who discounted any rumors to that effect, chuckled as he pictured his coat of arms, with a custard pie rampant.

Always, he said, he had wanted to get away from them, from the first. As far back as his earliest days in the movies he had striven to put some real characterization into his parts, and not depend solely on a bakery for his technic. The story of his debut into pictures had a new sidelight shed on it by the comedian.

"I was playing at Philadelphia when a strange telegram came to the theatre. It was addressed to some weird name—Champagne, or something like that. At any rate it began with 'Ch,' so I figured it must be for me. It said I was to meet some one on important business in the Longacre Building in New York city. I asked my friends what kind of persons occupied the Longacre Building. They said, 'Lawyers,' which got me excited.

"There had been some kind of aunt in my family—a couple of generations removed—who was expected to die some day and leave us all a big fortune. Of course, she was probably mythical—you know how there are stories like that in every family. But I'd heard about her so often, and when I learned that lawyers occupied the Longacre Building I went there expecting that at last my ship had come in. But it turned out to be nothing more than an introduction to the movies.

"When I first began to act before the movies I was terribly nervous. It wasn't so much the fact that I was appearing in a strange studio, before cold eyed stage hands. But the Keystone people who hired me had seen me in 'A Night in a Music Hall,' and I was heralded as a frightfully funny man. I had a reputation to live up to, and I felt desperately put to it to make good. And all the other comedians stood around the studio with superciliously twisted mouths and an air of 'Show me.'

"That was all the harder because, never having been in a movie studio before, I thought it would be the easiest thing to act before a camera. I figured it would be nothing but walking through my part. Well, I was quickly disillusioned. I had to study the business. I had to get over feeling self-conscious before the camera. The way to do that is to concentrate on your part so hard you lose yourself in it. If you don't you might just as well quit acting in the movies.

Good Stage Training Helps, As His Career Shows

"Moreover, I had the advantage of a good stage training. Every screen actor would be helped immeasurably by that. I'd acted under an excellent stage director—Quentin McPherson, director for Charles Frohman, for whom, by the way, I appeared in 'Sherlock Holmes.' No, I'll never go back to the speaking stage again. I'm not a very good speaking player, and, besides, an audience means nothing to me. They are just a mass of figures. I like to go off somewhere in seclusion, work out a picture and then suddenly spring it on people and say: 'Here, look at it—that's me.'

"That stage experience gave me quite a lead from the beginning over other movie actors. Very few of them in those days understood the technique of movie acting. They'd walk too fast, or cross over in front of one another with the utmost nonchalance. Besides I was surprised to discover that few of them, even those most concerned in the production of pictures, took it seriously. It was just a cheap sideline with them, a means of making a livelihood. From the first I took it very seriously. I had been deeply impressed, as I still am, with the powerful appeal of the motion picture, with its great circulation, its—what's the word (he snapped his fingers) —its great scope."

Perhaps Chaplin underrates his desire to read, for he is fond of Frank Harris's works, and reads Guido Bruno—both of whom are often an effort for the man in the street. But his reluctance to read, he indicated, is due not only to distrust of having his cinema ideas colored, but also because he doesn't want his writing affected. For Chaplin disclosed that he has secretly been indulging in writing—that he has even been concocting poetry all these years, with scarcely any one suspecting it.

"Yes, I've scribbled a great deal," he said. "Poetry and such things. I've never written any short stories nor esays. Most of my writings have been unfinished. I start off at a great rate, and then lose interest. You know how you put a thing aside, promising yourself you'll complete it some day, when you feel more inclined. That's how I've written.

"I've projected several full length plays, though I've never done anything with them. But I have taken to playwriting more seriously of late. And—I've completed a one act play."

He launched into a description of it, detailing how it was a satire on a certain type of piety, in which a child lay dying while a thunderstorm raged outside and an old crone numbled pious phrases inside and a man went crazy. A bright little gruesome bit it seemed, though Chaplin added, with a grin, that "It had funny passages in it." The unique point about it was that two mysterious men who sat down in front on the stage during the action turned out in the end to be the author and the manager, who insisted that "this play will never get produced unless it has a happy ending," with which the author agreed.

"Probably that author is more fortunate than I am, for I shall most likely never get it printed or produced. I don't expect to present it at my own expense, either. But maybe some day I shall read it to my friends, who may be able to stand anything."

That interest in religion displayed in this playlet is one of the underlying traits of the comedian. He considers that many religions in the world's history have been little but "repressions and propaganda."

"I have no 'spooks,' " he said. "There are none either in my mind or outside. I don't believe in spiritualism, and, frankly, I don't believe in a hereafter. Life is interesting enough as we have it here—let's make the most of it now."

He drank some hot water as he said that—perhaps so much talking had made him thirsty. Moreover, that drink seemed designed not only for his indigestion but to keep him from taking on weight. For, he admitted, "I'm afraid lately I've been taking on avoirdupois, and if I keep on"—he waved his hand with a mock flourish—"I shall lose my ethereal figure."

The comedian was not always as sturdy as he now is. When he was a lad in England, he said, he was quite frail. What helped him early in life was long distance running. It does not appear to be generally known that Chaplin at one time was a Marathon plugger.

"You see, I have quite a good lung development. And then, my legs were quite well developed from dancing with the 'Eight Lancashire Lads' on the stage. I used to belong to the Kennington Harriers, and thought nothing of running fifteen miles. In fact, I considered going into the Marathon in the London Olympics, but became ill about that time.

Can Run Ten Miles Easily And Retains Love of Sport

"I can still run ten miles without minding it. You never lose that stamina and lung power. People are surprised to-day to know that with my slight figure I can run long distances. Not so long ago I was at the beach with Samuel Goldwyn, and he got up off the sand and began doing some exercises.

"'You ought to take exercise, he said. 'Do this every day.' So I said, 'I think I'll run up and down between those two piers about twenty times. Want to try it with me?" He stared at me astonished, for the distance on the sand between the piers was about half a mile. But he and several other film people ran up and down with me a couple of times—then they dropped out. By that time a crowd had gathered around and as I kept going they started up a band. I ran up and down about ten times without any trouble."

The one thing that seems to sweep him away in artistic endeavor is dancing. He has the most enthusiastic admiration for Pavlowa.

"When I see her floating above me so gracefully, when I look at her face, I see the tragedy of life. I see the hard struggle in her career. Something seems to catch hold of me here." He placed a hand on his brow. "I get all choked up. The rhythm of it carries me away."

Of course in film production he is much interested in David W. Griffith. He was much drawn to "The Birth of a Nation," "Intolerance"—especially the Babylonian episode—and "Broken Blossoms."

"Griffith is a real personality, and he manages to convey it on the screen. He makes all his offerings distinct and individual. I always go to see a new Griffith picture. It may be terrible—I may disagree with his ideas—but they're always interesting. His pictures are different."

Then Chaplin wrinkled up his upper lip and his eyes in a startlingly real burlesque of the diabolical mask of the violin player in "Dream Street," and got up off his chair to wriggle in a travesty of the kind of "evil" to which the violinist's playing was supposed to incite the slum dwellers. But Chaplin confessed that it is not often he feels inspired to give such comic travesties.

Is Not Really a Comedian, He Says; Rarely Would Be Funny

"You see," he explained with a rather wistful smile, "I'm not really a comedian. Except on rare occasions I never feel inclined to try to be funny and carry on in company. Friends never say of me, 'Oh, he's a very amusing man to be with.' Frank Tinney is just as funny off the stage as he is on. I'm not—I wish I were. Mostly I like to be with people with whom I scarcely have to speak a word. All I want to do occasionally is, say, 'Um—ah—h'm!' I like people who understand when I do this"—and he pointed deftly to something, jerking his thumb as though he meant the subject to be picked up. "People whose sole conversation is to yawn and say, 'When do we eat?'

"Not that I think people talk too much. Very rarely do we really get under the skin of a personality in a conversation. The savages communicate with each other much more definitely and clearly. If they like you they stroke your hair, and so on. We cover up ourselves in words."

And then this strange compound of contradictions, who likes Barrie and considers "Mary Rose," for all the fact that it is a bad stage production, one of the most spiritual and delicate masterpieces he has ever seen, acknowledged that he "likes vulgarity, for it is of the masses—of the earth earthy—and I love that."

Interesting Stories About Animals

THE eagle, according to aeronautists, remains not merely the king of birds but in flying quality the swiftest of all birds. A French "flyer" from the French naval station at Salonica in February, 1916, had a match with an eagle near Mount Olympus. The eagle competed of his free will.

"I was followed by the eagle," writes Commander Larrowy, "at a distance of about 100 feet. Our machine was making her full measured sixty nautical miles an hour. In comparison with us the bird seemed so perfectly at a standstill that I was able to photograph it with an exposure of a half second, as the sky was cloudy, and the plate gave an absolutely neat reproduction.

"For two minutes the bird practically did not move its wings, and seemed to glide, except every ten or twelve seconds, when it made a very slight and careless sort of rowing motion as if to keep fit.

"When the bird abandoned all thought of attacking its strange rival it went full speed ahead, and covering much more than sixty miles an hour soon disappeared."

F. C. CORNELL, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, who recently returned to England after spending twenty years in practically unknown parts of South Africa, is author of a story about an unknown monster that had been seen near the Great Falls of the Orange River. It has a huge head and a neck ten feet long like a bending tree. It seizes the native cattle and drags them under water. The natives call it "Kyman," or the Great Thing.

Last May Mr. Cornell, accompanied by two white companions, W. H. Brown and N. B. Way of Capetown, and three Hottentots, went to the junction of the Orib and Orange rivers to see the monster if possible. He writes: "At the cries of the natives I saw something black, huge and sinuous swimming rapidly against the current in the swirling rapids. The monster kept its enormous body under water, but the neck was plainly visible.

"The monster may have been a very gigantic python, but if it was it was of an incredible size. This monster may have lived for hundreds of years. Pythons approaching it in size have been said to have lived that long."

ONE naturalist considers that it is pretty certain that at least some members of the crow tribe possess a measure of reasoning power, and he relates an incident in this relation that occurred in his own household.

A crow had been captured by the children and brought home and tamed. They were very fond of it and, of course, treated it with kindness. As in most houses where there are children, there was also a pet cat. The cat and the crow were friendly.

One day an unusually nice morsel was given to Tabby. This the crow not only looked at with envious eyes but made several attempts to secure. Tabby beat off each attempt, however, and the crow had to resort to strategem.

Disappearing through the open door, he returned in a few minutes with a long string that had been ravelled from an old sweater. Placing this on the floor, some little distance in front of the cat, he proceeded to wriggle it as he had seen the children do when playing with Tabby. The cat instantly jumped to catch the string. This was, of course, exactly what the crow wanted, and he, with equal dexterity, pounced upon the coveted morsel and flew away with it, leaving Tabby to the enjoyment of the string.